

Allowing gay marriages destroys the meaning of the institution

If you are like most Americans, you know that gay marriage is coming and you don't feel that you have the power to stop it. The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled (4 to 3) that the state's existing matrimonial laws are irrational and gave the legislature 180 days to revise them.

President Clinton, you may recall, signed a law called the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which declared that same sex "marriages" recognized in one state (Hawaii was the worry back then) would not be given full faith and credit in other states. It also defined marriage, for purposes of federal law, as the union of one man and one woman. But in light of the reasoning in the Supreme Court's Lawrence vs. Texas ruling, DOMA may no longer withstand the Supreme Court's imperial overstretch.

It's in the nature of our culture that things move very fast when the TV producers, magazine writers, screenwriters, journalists and a handful of judges join forces.

Already, the language of DOMA (1996) sounds slightly tinny and out of date. Just two weeks ago, Harvey Fierstein marched in drag



OPINION

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as "Mrs. Claus" at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York (against Macy's wishes, it should be noted) and was interviewed with amusement and fondness by television networks. Queer is "in."

Most of us have gay friends and no wish to cause homosexuals unhappiness. But if they insist that homosexual unions be sanctified, we have no choice but to resist.

Some conservatives have accepted the argument — most eloquently advanced by Andrew Sullivan — that backing gay marriage actually advances

a conservative position. Marriage, he argues, is a civilizing institution, and good conservatives should welcome the fact that a new group of people would like to live within its constraints of fidelity.

But it's not that simple. We know that traditional marriage forces men to constrain their normally promiscuous sexual behavior in favor of the monogamy that women tend to prefer. We further know that men's and women's natures differ in this respect.

Homosexuals and lesbians provide even more evidence of the obvious. Gay men tend to

have lots of sexual partners, whereas lesbians tend to be quite happy to settle down with one partner for long stretches. That's the nature of the beast.

Will marriage make gay men more monogamous? Doubtful. With no woman in the picture to insist upon it, the incentives are quite weak. To prove one's fidelity? To keep a promise? Those are far less weighty concerns than to uphold the family and respect God's law. Conversely, the lack of marriage has not made lesbians more promiscuous.

But, in all candor, society has much less of a stake in homosexual monogamy than it does in traditional marital fidelity because the principal function of marriage is provide for children. We very much want parents to remain together while their children are growing up. Whether a homosexual couple remains faithful is a matter of indifference to society (though by all means they should be able, through contracts and living wills, to ensure that inheritance, hospital visitation and so on are managed as they would prefer).

And while some homosexual couples are raising children, we should not be encouraging the practice.

Partisans of same sex marriage demand to

know how two gay men pledging themselves to one another can possibly hurt a "straight" couple. Indirectly. If marriage is to include gay men and women, by what standard can we exclude nongay threesomes? Nothing in the Supreme Court's or other courts' rulings have provided a principled grounds upon which to forbid adult incest, polygamy or polyandry. Homosexuals bristle at this argument. But they must answer a question: How does a homosexual father convince his daughter that polygamy is out of the question?

Marriage must, if the word is to retain its meaning, be only between one man and one woman. For as critics on both sides of the debate acknowledge, we're having a hard time upholding the integrity of marriage among the heterosexual population. At this moment, we ought to be reinvesting marriage with the honor it once commanded, not bleeding it of substance.

Such a drastic social experiment should not be undertaken on the strength of a 4-to-3 vote of one state's high court. If a constitutional amendment is required, so be it.

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